



Introduction

Sir Ludwig Guttman, the founding father of modern spinal cord injury management, noted that of all the many forms of disabilities that severe injury to the spinal cord is undoubtedly one of the most devastating calamities in human life (Guttman, 1976). Spinal cord injury can lead to significant life changes for the survivor and family. Over the past decade, most of the research has focused heavily on areas unrelated to key rehabilitation issues, such as transportation, personal assistance and return to work, despite overwhelming evidence that indicates that re-integration into school, employment and other community settings can be very difficult for those who experience this disability. Financial disincentives, a lack of transportation and personal care services are perhaps the primary causes of unemployment among adults with SCI.

The following articles focus on issues and techniques related to community integration for individuals with SCI. In this issue, a number of leaders in the field have submitted practical articles related to current practices in vocational rehabilitation for persons with SCI. We hope you will be able to immediately acquire valuable information from the contents that can be used in your day to day activities.

In the first article, Adams and Beatty describe an approach for meeting the need for personal assistance and discuss the advantages of using a customer driven approach. Research findings from this 3-year research project are also provided.

This is followed with an article by Anderson et al. which reviews issues involved in transition of children and adolescents with SCI into adulthood. These important issues include: education, vocational, independence, sexuality, psychosocial devel-

opment and long term health. Unique features of pediatric SCI as they relate to progression into adulthood and longterm outcomes of adults with pediatric SCI are presented.

Public policy initiatives, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (PL101-336) demand that accommodations be available to people with disabilities. At the same time, this presents new challenges to vocational support personnel. Dowler et al. reveal how the ADA can have a positive impact on employment for persons with SCI when all stakeholders work together to locate solutions. Over 1000 cases from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) database that involved workers with spinal cord injury were reviewed. The issues raised and suggestions for accommodations are presented along with a comparison of differences among calls related to workers with paraplegia vs. quadriplegia. The outcome data reveal that individuals with SCI can be gainfully employed and maintain employment over time.

Past research has documented that with limited formal services available, family members have become the primary caregivers for persons with severely disabling conditions. Family members have been thrust into a new kind of career and are typically responsible for a wide range of services that were formerly provided by health care providers. Elliot and Shewchuk address major issues concerning caregiving for persons with SCI, including the problems often encountered by care-givers. The cost for caregiving and effect on emotional and physical adjustment of survivors are discussed along with ways in which caregivers can be integrated into the rehabilitation process.

Ernst and Day make recommendations for re-

ducing disincentives for return to work. They call for an expansion of the role of vocational rehabilitation professionals to include flexibility in response to the requests of clients with SCI in order to improve longterm vocational outcomes.

This is suitably followed by an article by Inge et al. which provides insight into an innovative customer directed approach to supported employment. The use of workplace supports and assistive technology services for persons with severe SCI is described using a case study approach.

McKinley provides a brief overview of some of the exciting innovations in research and the management of SCI. These include innovations in the care and treatment of basic medical complications, spasticity and sexual dysfunction. An update on the search for a cure concludes this review.

Addressing transportation needs is critical for ensuring a persons' self determination in employment, housing and social arenas. In this article West et al. use a case study approach to illustrate how individuals with severe disability can be supported in their quest to design and access reliable individualized transportation systems.

The final article by Sherron Targett et al. pre-

sents preliminary data on community reintegration of a small sample of individuals with SCI. Results revealed that there are relatively few ongoing issues that are disproportionately problematic with regards to returning to work and the community post-injury. Due to the small size of the sample future follow up studies need to be conducted in order to further our understanding of community reentry post-SCI.

We believe this issue presents an array of articles that represent practices moving in the right direction toward adopting approaches that are responsive to people with severe disabilities and the community in which we live. It is hoped that you find the contents are not only helpful, but also stimulate ideas about where we need to be moving in the future.

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References

- Guttman, L., 1976. Spinal Cord Injuries, Blackwell Scientific, Oxford, England.